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JUNE, 1914

ON HEAVEN

*To V., who asked for a plan
for a working Heaven.*

I.



HAT day the sunlight lay on the farms,
On the morrow the bitter frost that there was!
That night my young love lay in my arms,
The morrow how bitter it was!

And because she is very tall and quaint
And golden, like a *quattrocento* saint,
I desire to write about Heaven;
To tell you the shape and the ways of it,
And the joys and the toil and the maze of it,
For these there must be in Heaven,
Even in Heaven!
For God is a good man, God is a kind man,

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

And God's a good brother, and God is no blind man,
And God is our father.

I will tell you how this thing began:
How I waited in a little town near Lyons many years,
And yet knew nothing of passing time, or of her tears,
But, for nine slow years, lounged away at my table in the
 shadowy sunlit square
Where the small cafés are.

The Place is small and shaded by great planes,
Over a rather human monument
Set up to *Louis Dixhuit* in the year
Eighteen fourteen; a funny thing with dolphins
About a pyramid of green-dripped, sordid stone.
But the enormous, monumental planes
Shade it all in, and in the flecks of sun
Sit market women. There's a paper shop
Painted all blue, a shipping agency,
Three or four cafés; dank, dark colonnades
Of an eighteen-forty *Mairie*. I'd no wish
To wait for her where it was picturesque,
Or ancient or historic, or to love
Over well any place in the land before she came
And loved it too. I didn't even go
To Lyons for the opera; Arles for the bulls,
Or Avignon for glimpses of the Rhone.
Not even to Beaucaire! I sat about

On Heaven

And played long games of dominoes with the *maire*,
Or passing *commis-voyageurs*. And so
I sat and watched the trams come in, and read
The *Libre Parole* and sipped the thin, fresh wine
They call Piquette, and got to know the people,
The kind, southern people. . . .

Until, when the years were over, she came in her swift
red car,
Shooting out past a tram; and she slowed and stopped and
lighted absently down,
A little dazed, in the heart of the town;
And nodded imperceptibly.
With a sideways look at me.

So our days here began.

And the wrinkled old woman who keeps the café,
And the man
Who sells the *Libre Parole*,
And the sleepy gendarme,
And the fat *facteur* who delivers letters only in the shady,
Pleasanter kind of streets;
And the boy I often gave a penny,
And the *maire* himself, and the little girl who loves toffee
And me because I have given her many sweets;
And the one-eyed, droll
Bookseller of the *rue Grand de Provence*,—

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Chancing to be going home to bed,
Smiled with their kindly, fresh benevolence,
Because they knew I had waited for a lady
Who should come in a swift, red, English car,
To the square where the little cafés are.
And the old, old woman touched me on the wrist
With a wrinkled finger,
And said: "Why do you linger?—
Too many kisses can never be kissed!
And comfort her—nobody here will think harm—
Take her instantly to your arm!
It is a little strange, you know, to your dear,
To be dead!"

But one is English,
Though one be never so much of a ghost;
And if most of your life have been spent in the craze to
 relinquish
What you want most,
You will go on relinquishing,
You will go on vanquishing
Human longings, even
In Heaven.

God! You will have forgotten what the rest of the world
 is on fire for—
The madness of desire for the long and quiet embrace,
The coming nearer of a tear-wet face;

On Heaven

Forgotten the desire to slake
 The thirst, and the long, slow ache,
 And to interlace
 Lash with lash, lip with lip, limb with limb, and the fingers
 of the hand with the hand
 And . . .

You will have forgotten
But they will all awake;
Aye, all of them shall awaken
In this dear place.
And all that then we took
Of all that we might have taken,
Was that one embracing look,
Coursing over features, over limbs, between eyes, a making
sure, and a long sigh,
Having the tranquillity
Of trees unshaken,
And the softness of sweet tears,
And the clearness of a clear brook
To wash away past years.
(For that too is the quality of Heaven,
That you are conscious always of great pain
Only when it is over
And shall not come again.
Thank God, thank God, it shall not come again,
Though your eyes be never so wet with the tears
Of many years!)

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

II

And so she stood a moment by the door
Of the long, red car. Royally she stepped down,
Settling on one long foot and leaning back
Amongst her russet furs. And she looked round . . .
Of course it must be strange to come from England
Straight into Heaven. You must take it in,
Slowly, for a long instant, with some fear . . .
Now that *affiche*, in orange, on the kiosk:
"Seven Spanish bulls will fight on Sunday next
At Arles, in the arena" . . . Well, it's strange
Till you get used to our ways. And, on the *Mairie*,
The untidy poster telling of the *concours*
De vers de soie, of silkworms. The cocoons
Pile, yellow, all across the little Places
Of ninety townships in the environs
Of Lyons, the city famous for silks.
What if she's pale? It must be more than strange,
After these years, to come out here from England
To a strange place, to the stretched-out arms of me,
A man never fully known, only divined,
Loved, guessed at, pledged to, in your Sussex mud,
Amongst the frost-bound farms by the yeasty sea.
Oh, the long look; the long, long searching look!
And how my heart beat!

Well, you see, in England
She had a husband. And four families—

On Heaven

His, hers, mine, and another woman's too—
Would have gone crazy. And, with all the rest,
Eight parents, and the children, seven aunts
And sixteen uncles and a grandmother.
There were, besides, our names, a few real friends,
And the decencies of life. A monstrous heap!
They made a monstrous heap. I've lain awake
Whole aching nights to tot the figures up!
Heap after heaps, of complications, griefs,
Worries, tongue-clackings, nonsenses and shame
For not making good. You see the coil there was!
And the poor strained fibres of our tortured brains,
And the voice that called from depth in her to depth
In me . . . my God, in the dreadful nights,
Through the roar of the great black winds, through the
 sound of the sea!
Oh agony! Agony! From out my breast
It called whilst the dark house slept, the stairheads creaked;
From within my breast it screamed and made no sound;
And wailed . . . And made no sound.
And howled like the damned. . . No sound! No sound!
Only the roar of the wind, the sound of the sea,
The tick of the clock. . .
And our two voices, noiseless through the dark.
O God! O God!

(That night my young love lay in my arms. . . .

There was a bitter frost lay on the farms

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In England, by the shiver
And the crawling of the tide;
By the broken silver of the English Channel,
Beneath the aged moon that watched alone—
Poor, dreary, lonely old moon to have to watch alone,
Over the dreary beaches mantled with ancient foam
Like shrunken flannel;
The moon, an intent, pale face, looking down
Over the English Channel.
But soft and warm She lay in the crook of my arm,
And came to no harm since we had come quietly home
Even to Heaven;
Which is situate in a little old town
Not very far from the side of the Rhone,
That mighty river
That is, just there by the Crau, in the lower reaches,
Far wider than the Channel.)

But, in the market place of the other little town,
Where the Rhone is a narrower, greener affair,
When she had looked at me, she beckoned with her long
white hand,
A little languidly, since it is a strain, if a blessed strain, to
have just died.
And, going back again,
Into the long, red, English racing car,
Made room for me amongst the furs at her side.
And we moved away from the kind looks of the kindly
people

On Heaven

Into the wine of the hurrying air.
And very soon even the tall gray steeple
Of Lyons cathedral behind us grew little and far
And then was no more there. . . .
And, thank God, we had nothing any more to think of,
And thank God, we had nothing any more to talk of;
Unless, as it chanced, the flashing silver stalk of the pampas
Growing down to the brink of the Rhone,
On the lawn of a little chateau, giving onto the river.
And we were alone, alone, alone. . . .
At last alone. . . .

The poplars on the hill-crests go marching rank on rank,
And far away to the left, like a pyramid, marches the
ghost of Mont Blanc.
There are vines and vines and vines, all down to the river
bank.
There will be a castle here,
And an abbey there;
And huge quarries and a long white farm,
With long thatched barns and a long wine shed,
As we ran alone, all down the Rhone.

And that day there was no puncturing of the tires to fear;
And no trouble at all with the engine and gear;
Smoothly and softly we ran between the great poplar alley
All down the valley of the Rhone.
For the dear, good God knew how we needed rest and to
be alone.

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But, on other days, just as you must have perfect shadows
to make perfect Rembrandts,
He shall afflict us with little lets and hindrances of His own
Devising—just to let us be glad that we are dead. . .
Just for remembrance.

III

Hard by the castle of God in the Alpilles,
In the eternal stone of the Alpilles,
There's this little old town, walled round by the old, gray
gardens. . . .
There were never such olives as grow in the gardens of
God,
The green-gray trees, the wardens of agony
And failure of gods.
Of hatred and faith, of truth, of treachery
They whisper; they whisper that none of the living prevail;
They whirl in the great mistral over the white, dry sods,
Like hair 'blown back from white foreheads in the enormous
gale
Up to the castle walls of God. . . .

But, in the town that's our home,
Once you are past the wall,
Amongst the trunks of the planes,
Though they roar never so mightily overhead in the day,

On Heaven

All this tumult is quieted down, and all
The windows stand open because of the heat of the night
That shall come.
And, from each little window, shines in the twilight a light,
And, beneath the eternal planes
With the huge, gnarled trunks that were aged and gray
At the creation of Time,
The Chinese lanterns, hung out at the doors of hotels,
Shimmering in the dusk, here on an orange tree, there on a
sweet-scented lime,
There on a golden inscription: "Hotel of the Three Holy
Bells,"
Or "Hotel Sublime," or "Inn of the Real Good Will."
And, yes, it is very warm and still,
And all the world is a-foot after the heat of the day,
In the cool of the even in Heaven. . . .
And it is here that I have brought my dear to pay her all
that I owed her,
Amidst this crowd, with the soft voices, the soft footfalls,
the rejoicing laughter.
And after the twilight there falls such a warm, soft dark-
ness,
And there will come stealing under the planes a drowsy
odor,
Compounded all of cyclamen, of oranges, of rosemary and
bay,
To take the remembrance of the toil of the day away.

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So we sat at a little table, under an immense plane,
And we remembered again
The blisters and foments
And terrible harassments of the tired brain,
The cold and the frost and the pain,
As if we were looking at a picture and saying: "This is
true!

Why this is a truly painted
Rendering of that street where—you remember?—I
fainted."

And we remembered again
Tranquilly, our poor few tranquil moments,
The falling of the sunlight through the panes,
The flutter forever in the chimney of the quiet flame,
The mutter of our two poor tortured voices, always a-
whisper

And the endless nights when I would cry out, running
through all the gamut of misery, even to a lisp, her name;
And we remembered our kisses, nine, maybe, or eleven—
If you count two that I gave and she did not give again.

And always the crowd drifted by in the cool of the even,
And we saw the faces of friends,
And the faces of those to whom one day we must make
amends,
Smiling in welcome.
And I said: "On another day—
And such a day may well come soon—

On Heaven

We will play dominoes with Dick and Evelyn and Frances
For a whole afternoon.
And, in the time to come, Genée
Shall dance for us, fluttering over the ground as the sun-
light dances.”
And *Arlésiennes* with the beautiful faces went by us,
And gypsies and Spanish shepherds, noiseless in sandals of
straw, sauntered nigh us,
Wearing slouch hats and old sheep-skins, and casting ad-
miring glances
From dark, foreign eyes at my dear. . . .
(And ah, it is Heaven alone, to have her alone and so near!)
So all this world rejoices
In the cool of the even
In Heaven. . . .

And, when the cool of the even was fully there,
Came a great ha-ha of voices.
Many children run together, and all laugh and rejoice and
call,
Hurrying with little arms flying, and little feet flying, and
little hurrying haunches,
From the door of a stable,
Where, in an *olla podrida*, they had been playing at the *cor-
rida*
With the black Spanish bull, whose nature
Is patience with children. And so, through the gaps in
the branches

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Of jasmine on our screen beneath the planes,
We saw, coming down from the road that leads to the
 olives and Alpilles,
A man of great stature,
In a great cloak,
With a great stride,
And a little joke
For all and sundry, coming down with a hound at his side.
And he stood at the cross-roads, passing the time of day
In a great, kind voice, the voice of a man-and-a-half!—
With a great laugh, and a great clap on the back,
For a fellow in black—a priest I should say,
Or may be a lover,
Wearing black for his mistress's mood.
“A little toothache,” we could hear him say; “but that's so
 good
When it gives over.” So he passed from sight
In the soft twilight, into the soft night,
In the soft riot and tumult of the crowd.

And a magpie flew down, laughing, holding up his beak to
 us.
And I said: “That was God! Presently, when he has
 walked through the town
And the night has settled down,
So that you may not be afraid,
In the darkness, he will come to our table and speak to us.”

On Heaven

And past us many saints went walking in a company—
The kindly, thoughtful saints, devising and laughing and
talking,
And smiling at us with their pleasant solicitude.
And because the thick of the crowd followed to the one side
God,
Or to the other the saints, we sat in solitude.
And quietly, quietly walking, there came before us a
woman—
That woman that no man on earth or in Heaven
May not divinely love and prize above
All other women; even above love.
That woman, even she, came walking quietly,
And quietly stood by the table before us,
So near that we could almost hear her breathing.
In the distance the saints went singing all in chorus,
And our Lord went by on the other side of the street,
Holding a little boy,
Taking him to pick the musk-roses that open at dusk,
For wreathing the statue of Jove,
Left on the Alpilles above
By the Romans; since Jove,
Even Jove,
Must not want for his quota of honor and love;
But round about him there must be,
With all its tender jollity,
The laughter of children in Heaven,
Making merry with roses in Heaven.

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Yet never he looked at us, knowing that would be such joy
As must be over-great for hearts that needed quiet;
Such a riot and tumult of joy as quiet hearts are not able
To taste to the full. And then that woman, standing by
our table,
So near that we could mark her quiet breathing,
And the tranquil rise and fall of her breast beneath the
woolen cloak,
And the tender, lovely and mild, dear eyes that looked at
my dear—
That woman spoke, in her soft, clear, certain tone:
"It is so very good to have borne a son;
It is sad that you have no child!"

There went by an old man carrying many carven gourds,
And, as if it gave her the thought of a pilgrimage,
"To Lourdes,"
She said, "is not so very far; go there tomorrow,
And there shall come much joy and little sorrow
With the coming of a son very slender and straight and up-
right,
With a clear glance, and fair cheeks red and white
With our suns of France,
And a sweet voice, very courteous and truthful;
Surely, you shall rejoice!"
And, as she went, looking back over her shoulder, with eyes
so sweet, so clear and so ruthless,
"Go there," she said, "when you have quietly slept,

On Heaven

And kneel you down upon the green grass sod,
And ask then for your child; my word shall be kept.
For these are the dear, pretty angels of God,
And of them there cannot be too many."

And so I said to my dear one: "That is our Lady!"
And my dear one sat in the shadows; very softly she wept:—
Such joy is in Heaven,
In the cool of the even,
After the burden and toil of the days,
After the heat and haze
In the vine-hills; or in the shady
Whispering groves in high passes up in the Alpilles,
Guarding the castle of God.

And I went on talking towards her unseen face:
(Ah God, the peace, to know that she was there!)
"So it is, so it goes, in this beloved place,
There shall be never a grief but passes; no, not any;
There shall be such bright light and no blindness;
There shall be so little awe and so much loving-kindness;
There shall be a little longing and enough care,
There shall be a little labor and enough of toil
To bring back the lost flavor of our human coil;
Not enough to taint it;
And all that we desire shall prove as fair as we can paint
it."

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For, though that may be the very hardest trick of all
God set himself, who fashioned this goodly hall,
Thus he has made Heaven;
Even Heaven.

For God is a very clever mechanician;
And if he made this proud and goodly ship of the world,
From the maintop to the hull,
Do you think he could not finish it to the full,
With a flag and all,
And make it sail, tall and brave,
On the waters, beyond the grave?
It should cost but very little rhetoric
To explain for you that last, fine, conjuring trick;
Nor does God need to be a very great magician
To give to each man after his heart,
Who knows very well what each man has in his heart:
To let you pass your life in a night-club where they dance,
If that is your idea of heaven; if you will, in the South of
France;
If you will, on the turbulent sea; if you will, in the peace
of the night;
Where you will; how you will;
Or in the long death of a kiss, that may never pall:
He would be a very little God if he could not do all this,
And he is still
The great God of all.

On Heaven

For God is a good man; God is a kind man;
In the darkness he came walking to our table beneath the
 planes,
And spoke
So kindly to my dear,
With a little joke,
Giving himself some pains
To take away her fear
Of his stature,
So as not to abash her,
In no way at all to dash her new pleasure beneath the
 planes,
In the cool of the even
In heaven.

That, that is God's nature.
For God's a good brother, and God is no blind man,
And God's a good mother and loves sons who're rovers,
And God is our father and loves all good lovers.
He has a kindly smile for many a poor sinner;
He takes note to make it up to poor wayfarers on sodden
 roads;
Such as bear heavy loads
He takes note of, and of all that toil on bitter seas and
 frosty lands,
He takes care that they shall have good at his hands;
Well he takes note of a poor old cook,
Cooking your dinner;

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And much he loves sweet joys in such as ever took
Sweet joy on earth. He has a kindly smile for a kiss
Given in a shady nook.
And in the golden book
Where the accounts of his estate are kept,
All the round, golden sovereigns of bliss,
Known by poor lovers, married or never yet married,
Whilst the green world waked, or the black world quietly
slept;
All joy, all sweetness, each sweet sign that's sighed—
Their accounts are kept,
And carried
By the love of God to his own credit's side.
So that is why he came to our table to welcome my dear,
dear bride,
In the cool of the even
In front of a café in Heaven.

Ford Madox Hueffer